

Revelation Of The Great 'I AM'

**Perspectives On
The Gospel Of John**

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Chapter 26

Before Abraham Was, 'I AM'- Jn.8:48-59

⁴⁸"Then the Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?" ⁴⁹Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. ⁵⁰And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges. ⁵¹Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death." ⁵²Then the Jews said to Him, "Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.' ⁵³Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?" ⁵⁴Jesus answered, "If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. ⁵⁵Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, 'I do not know Him,' I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. ⁵⁶Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." ⁵⁷Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" ⁵⁸Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." ⁵⁹Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by."

They are definitely not happy with His remark about them having the devil as their father. This was such a blatant dishonoring statement to these proud religious leaders. Therefore, they, in turn, will dishonor Him and accuse Him of having a devil and to add further insult they call Him a Samaritan who has a devil.¹ Wow, the gloves are off. They have witnessed Him conversing with Samaritans, considered above all by the religious leaders a despised people. They are a people marked as unfaithful to the Word of God, and rebels against the Jewish system by declaring their Temple at Mount Gerizim as the true house of God over Jerusalem,² not to mention their intermarriage with other people groups. It will not be the last time they accuse Jesus of having a demon or of doing miracles empowered by demons (Matt.12:24-32; Lk.11:18-26). Jesus points out to them that the accusation of Him having a demon is absurd. The real and more serious issue here is of them failing to honor Him, especially in making such a statement they also fail to honor God. The truth is that Jesus is not

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there for His own glory as they are. Jesus follows that up with a stern warning that the Father will judge their words and actions, certainly not a desirable place to be. Despite this Jesus opens up a way for repentance and invites them to believe in Him, for His words are from above and as a consequence, they will have life even though they may die (Ps.89:48). Another absurd claim to their ears, for only God can give life (Gen.1). As to the truthfulness and faithfulness of the claim, Jesus again prefaces this with a double Amen.

They have just come to a moment of decision; will they join the dots, will they believe? Unfortunately, so enraged by their pride they feel His words have now validated their accusation. He is deluded. He does have a demon. What sane person would dare suggest that He is greater than the giver of life, God, or their forefather Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel who despite his greatness is dead?³ Would He presume to be greater than the prophets of old who spoke the very oracles of God and gave them the Tanach - the Holy Writings? Well, that is exactly what He is trying to get through to them. He is not promoting Himself; it is God, His Father, who promotes Him. If He denies His Father and who He is, it would make Him a liar like them who assert that they know God, yet clearly do not. Jesus knows Him and keeps His word, which they do not.⁴

The line of demarcation is clear and stated in unequivocal terms. He further articulates the degree of separation by stating that even Abraham saw His day and was glad (Heb.11:13); yet here they stand totally hostile to His presence, which was prophesied long ago. The statement concerning

Abraham's foresight and rejoicing is not unlike some of the rabbinic speculations about the implications of Abraham's covenant vision (Gen.15:17-21). Some rabbis argued that Abraham was given a panoramic view of his descendants. Rabbi Akiba held that Abraham was given a vision of both this age/world and the age to come (Rab.44:22-28; 4Ezra 3:14).⁵

Let us not forget the Pre-incarnate Christ dined with Abraham in his tent, walked and talked with Him and granted His request in relation to saving Lot and his family (Gen.18). This is now God Incarnate before them. The very One who met and walked with Abraham granting him and his family life; and He is making that connection.

The key line here is the question they pose to Him, '*Who do you make yourself out to be?*' They rightly point out that He is not even 50 years old,⁶ and yet He claims to know what Abraham saw and thought. How deluded could one person be to their mind making such a grandiose claim? He will next make the unambiguous claim, "*Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was 'I AM.'*" This double Amen for emphasis followed by the

*juxtaposing of the past tense concerning Abraham, with both the prior time, and the present tense, as they relate to Jesus, explodes all natural reasoning concerning time.*⁷

Jesus is saying, you can trust this to be true and because of this truth, you can also trust as true My words and if you keep My word you will never see death. This is too radical for the natural mind to comprehend that He was before Abraham, yet stands here transcending time and space. Even Peter's declaration of Jesus being the Messiah was said by Jesus to be a revelation from heaven, for the natural mind cannot understand such lofty things (Matt.16:17).

John wants us to filter this Gospel through the Prologue's opening words, to understand Jesus in the following ways:

- *In universal cosmic terms (space)* - His coming has an impact on the entire world, not merely on God's chosen people, the Jews (1:11-12).
- *In eternal terms (time)* - Jesus was not merely a '*divine man*,' a mere human being with an unusual sense of the divine; He Himself is God (1:1), pre-existent as the Word through whom everything that is came into being (1:3).
- *In essential terms (being)* - greater than any one of Jesus' miracle/signs, greater than any one of Jesus teachings, is the fact of Who Jesus is; being precedes essence, essence precedes action. '*I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life*' (14:6). He not only resurrects others and rises from the dead Himself; He is the resurrection (11:25).

John is building his case and these words are clearly understood by those present as blasphemous, a declaration of equality in essence with God, for only God was there before Abraham. *The Message Bible* renders this

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passage well when it says, *"Believe me," said Jesus, "I am who I am long before Abraham was anything."* Their understanding is evident in them taking up stones to stone Him. Blasphemy was not tolerated. Yet they will prove unsuccessful because Jesus' hour has not arrived and He moves past them blending into the crowd. They did not recognize that they were part of a Divine visitation, they did not recognize Him as the Light of the World nor will they recognize His works as the next chapter will bear out.

This passage stands as an overt declaration by Jesus as to His heavenly beginning, yet today, one of the most disputed debates is that of the Deity of Christ. Sects and cults have the common hallmark of diminishing the person of Christ to that of a created being, a wise sage, or merely a prophet, and yet the writer of Hebrews will ask:

⁵"For to which of the angels did He say at any time, "You are My Son, this day I have begotten You?" And again, "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son?"⁶ And again, when He brings in the First-born into the world, He says, "And let all the angels of God worship Him."⁷ And of the angels He says, "Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire."⁸ But to the Son He says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Your kingdom.⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity, therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your fellows."¹⁰ And, "You, Lord, have laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the works of Your hands.¹¹ They shall perish, but You will remain. And they shall all become old as a garment,¹² and as a covering You shall fold them up, and they shall be changed. But You are the same, and Your years shall not fail."¹³ But to which of the angels, did He say at any time, "Sit on My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool?"¹⁴ Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb.1).

The preoccupation of cults is to demote the person of Christ and then to demote the Holy Spirit from the status of God to that of merely the breath of God, a force (Ac.5:1-11). If you demote Jesus, you will have an insufficient Saviour and will need to resort to works to bridge the gap. Will we deny who He is despite His own claims? Will we be hardhearted and judge carnally like the religious people to whom He spoke? This chapter passes from lightning flash to lightning flash of astonishment. Jesus makes

claim after claim, each more tremendous than the one that went before it.⁸ Jesus had the opportunity at every turn to say who He was, or was not; it was precisely what they wanted to know here, yet He consistently unveiled Himself as God Incarnate. Either we believe Him or the entire Word of God is a lie and He was nothing more than a liar and a lunatic.

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NOTES

¹ Aramaic behind the term “Samaritan,” which meant “*the chief of demons*” Utley, R. J. D., 1999: 87.

² The Jewish inhabitants of Samaria identified Mount Gerizim as the chosen place of God and the only center of worship, calling it the “*navel of the earth*” because of a tradition that Abraham sacrificed there. Freeman, J. M., & Chadwick, H. J., 1998: 517.

³ “*Are you greater than our father Abraham?* Μη συ μειζων ει του πατρος ημων Αβρααμ? *Negative answer expected* by μη, with ablative case of comparison in πατρος after μειζων. The question was designed to put Jesus in a difficult position, for Abraham and the prophets all “*died*.” Robertson, A., 1997: Jn.8:53.

⁴ In the deepest intimacy Jesus has a relationship and union with God but His enemies did not. Jesus *knows* oida, “*to know inherently or intuitively*” the Father, but they did not *know* ginōskō, “*to come to know by experience or observation*” Him. For Him to deny this would be to lie, just as they were lying. Walvoord, J. F. et. al., 1983: Jn.8:55.

⁵ Borchert, G. L: 308; Jewish tradition emphasized that Abraham had been shown the future kingdoms that would oppress Israel and the messianic era beyond them. Keener, C. S. et. al., 1993: Jn.8:56.

⁶ “*Thou art not yet fifty years old*” πενήκοντα ἔτη οὐπω ἔχεις. Not yet reached the age of completed manhood. Vincent, M. R., 2002: Jn.8:57.

⁷ Ibid: 309.

⁸ Barclay, W., 2000: 32-33.

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FURTHER STUDY

Greek text of the *Before Abraham Was*, 'I AM' 8:48-59

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Insights on the *Before Abraham Was*, 'I AM' 8:48-59

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Kóstenberger, A., 1999: 113-116.

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Moloney, F. J. (Ed), 1989: 282-288.

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Riesen, R. "'Jesus the Logician': A (Very) Modest Proposal." *Christian Scholar's Review* 34, no. 3 (2005): 341-51.

Tasker, R.V.G., 1983: 110-122.

Tenney, M. C., 1989: 143-151.